

Air Force leadership committed to health care for all retirees

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One of the biggest quality of life issues facing the Air Force today is health care.

For the retired members of our Air Force family, it is their number one concern — particularly having access to medical care after turning age 65. Our retirees stood for America and fought the fight. We must find solutions to their health care needs because it is the right thing to do.

Our goal is to provide a meaningful medical benefit, to include pharmacy coverage. Our challenge is to provide this without bankrupting the system. This is no small task.

There are many demonstration projects looking at alternative solutions. For example, the TRICARE Senior Prime demonstration is proving popular with our retirees. However, we have significant issues with funding and benefit design that need to be addressed before this can be a permanent solution. There is concern that there is no cohesive plan to link the demonstrations together. The solution to senior retiree care should be an integrated mix of benefit op-

tions, not a one-plan-fits-all approach.

I am gratified to see that Congress shares our concern for providing health care benefits to our senior retirees. Numerous bills have been introduced this legislative session addressing this issue. A benefit without funding does not bring health care to our retirees. We must have congressional funding support.

The Air Force is not idly sitting by, but aggressively pursuing solutions. Our Surgeon General, Lt. Gen. Paul Carlton, Jr., is pushing forward with creative options involving all parties who play a role in providing health care for seniors: the DoD, the Health Care Financing Agency, and contracted health plans. The Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, Gen. John Handy, also is pushing hard for solutions through the Defense Medical Oversight Committee, the tri-service oversight body for medical benefits and funding.

There is still work to be done to reach our goals. Air Force senior leaders are taking the lead to work with our retirees, the other military services, Health Affairs and Congress to ensure appropriate health care benefits for all our members, including our senior retirees.

Simple solutions for sensitive teeth

One of the most common complaints from dental patients is tooth sensitivity, according to Capt. Randall Jones, preventive dentistry officer here.

Sensitivity can be described as a sharp, short pain, usually initiated by hot or cold foods or exposure to cold air, said Jones. The cause of sensitivity is cell stimulation in the small tubules in the dentin. When the gums recede or the hard enamel is worn away, the small tubule surfaces are exposed, therefore causing pain.

Touching teeth or exposing them to cold air may also cause pain, said Jones. Teeth may expand and contract during hot and cold temperature changes.

In the United States there are at least 45 million adults who suffer from sensitive teeth, said Jones. Sensitivity can sometimes be reduced by using a soft-bristled toothbrush and by brushing gently. If the toothbrush bristles are pointing in multiple directions, then brushing is too hard. Brushing the teeth too hard can wear away the their root surface, exposing sensitive spots.

It's best to get diagnosed by a dentist if a tooth is extremely sensitive for more than three or four days, and if it reacts to hot and cold temperatures, according to Jones. Make sure the dentist is informed about when it

started and if there is anything that helps ease the pain such as applying a warm compress.

Dentists can do many things to manage tooth sensitivity, both in the office, and by recommending products applied at home by the patient, said Jones. A dentist may apply a protective coating or desensitizing agent. A stannous fluoride gel or an over-the-counter desensitizing toothpaste containing fluoride and either potassium nitrate or strontium chloride can also be used. These ingredients may help block the transmission of sensation to the nerve from the tooth.

The dentist may suggest changing any oral hygiene habits that may cause abrasion, or to eliminate acidic foods, medications, highly concentrated foods and flavored toothpaste, said Jones. A daily fluoride rinse or brush-on gel may also be suggested.

For more information about sensitive teeth, or any dental concerns, contact the dental flight at 963-6839. **(submitted by the 437th Dental Flight)**

